Name: Prof.

American Government

PO 101

Number of Credits: 3

Spring 2025

Matthew Cawvey

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Course meeting days: Mon, Wed, and Fri

Course meeting time: 8–8:50 a.m.

Course meeting place: Erskine Building-312

Course Description: A study of the structure and function of the institutions of the U.S. national government.

Prerequisites: None.

Course Student Learning Goals:

1. Explain how citizens, civil society, and governmental institutions operate in the American political system, both in contemporary times and historically (communication and critical thinking).
2. Compare the U.S. political system with political systems in other countries (critical thinking).
3. Analyze local, national, and global issues (critical thinking and global awareness).
4. Engage in academic writing, with a focus on American government (communication and critical thinking).
5. Engage in civil discussion about current events in U.S. politics (ethics/morals).

Texts and Resources:

1. Amy E. Black. 2012. *Honoring God in Red or Blue: Approaching Politics with Humility, Grace, and Reason*. Chicago: Moody Publishers. ISBN: 9780802404879.
2. Lori M. Poloni-Staudinger and Michael R. Wolf. 2020. *American Difference: A Guide to American Politics in Comparative Perspective*. 2nd ed. Los Angeles: CQ Press. ISBN: 9781544325330.

Course-Specific Information:

Politics affects us all: Taxes, inflation, immigration, abortion, student loans, the environment, and foreign wars constitute a sample of the issues under consideration in this year's presidential election. Because of the essential role of citizens in an electoral democracy such as the United States, we will explore one core question for the semester: **How should citizens in a democracy interact with the political system and with one another?** Informed, thoughtful, and respectful citizenship could characterize Americans; so we will discuss and practice political civility, investigate why groups and individuals participate in politics; explore the design of the U.S. political system; and compare politics in America and other countries.

Not only will our class encourage good citizenship, but you also will prepare for the workforce. Employers are seeking job candidates who can explain, compare, analyze, write, and civilly discuss information (Student Learning Goals #1–5).

Let me clarify my **core commitment**: I am a Christian political scientist who endorses Erskine College's mission of faith–learning integration. My classes thus apply the following Christian practices: spiritual reading (i.e., repeated, in-depth review of assigned texts, including readings by Christian authors), prayer (e.g., at the start or end of class), simplicity (e.g., economy of language), rest (i.e., no deadlines on Sundays), and fellowship (e.g., extra credit opportunities with light refreshments).[1] Because Erskine is a missional school rather than a covenantal one, students are **not** required to follow Jesus, and thoughtful responses from any worldview will receive good grades. However, I **invite** you to embrace the following statements:

[1] Please see David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith, eds. 2011. *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdsmans.

1. **Jesus Christ is Lord of all**, and we should seek His guidance as we learn about the political world, evaluate solutions to policy problems in society, and practice our responsibilities as citizens and residents in a democracy. All political behaviors thus should be acts of worship (Romans 12:1); moreover, we should prioritize God's concerns for justice and the common good.
2. Christians may not adopt identical understandings of politics, but God can enable us to treat each another with kindness amid our differences. And on a continuous basis, we can allow our faith in Jesus—instead of alternative sources—to shape our political views.
3. Approaching politics as a Christian is the **most joyful, rewarding, redemptive, and meaningful way** to engage the political ideas and arguments in political science classes and everyday life!

Course Schedule:

Week	Topic(s) and Learning Target(s)	Assignments
0 (Jan 6–11)	Prepare for a successful semester	• Purchase textbooks
1 (Jan 13–18)	Topics: • Syllabus • Class introduction • Political civility • Political compromise Learning targets: • Understand the syllabus • Identify and reflect on the responsibilities of citizenship • Define and analyze the concept of political civility • Define the concept of political compromise and distinguish appropriate from inappropriate cases of political compromise	• In class on Monday: Read syllabus and sign the agreement on the final page • Before class on Wednesday: Read the introduction and chapter 1 of *Honoring God* • Before class on Friday: Read chapter 2 of *Honoring God*
2 (Jan 20–25)	Topics: • The purpose and limits of government • Political parties and ideologies Learning targets: • Explain and analyze the purpose and limits of government • Explain the ideological beliefs of political parties in the United States and evaluate parties and ideologies	• No class on Monday: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day! • Before class on Wednesday: Read chapter 3 of *Honoring God* • Before class on Friday: Read chapters 4 and 5 of *Honoring God* • In class on Friday: Bonus quiz
3 (Jan 27–Feb 1)	Topics: • Church and state in U.S. history • Civil religion and political theology • Political disagreement Learning targets: • Explain and evaluate the relationship between church and state in U.S. history • Define and evaluate civil religion and political theology • Explain how to disagree about politics peacefully and productively	• Start of class on Monday: Reading quiz 1 on news article (TBD) and chapters 6–8 of *Honoring God* • In class on Friday: Bonus quiz
4 (Feb 3–8)	Topics: • Applying faith to policy problems • Informed citizenship Learning targets: • Apply a Christian worldview to political issues in the news • Explain and evaluate approaches to informed citizenship	• Start of class on Monday: Reading quiz 2 on news article (TBD) and chapters 9–11 of *Honoring God* • In class on Friday: Bonus quiz

5 (Feb 10–15)	Topics: • Debating the issues of the day • Multiple-choice and true/false (MC and TF) exam 1 • Take-home essay exam 1 (individual) Learning targets: • Apply your knowledge about political civility to a simulated debate with a fellow student • Demonstrate your knowledge of unit 1 through an MC and TF exam • Analyze and evaluate the content of unit 1 through a take-home essay exam	• In class on Monday: Simulation 1 • In class on Wednesday: Finish simulation 1 (if needed) and review for exam 1 • In class on Friday: MC and TF exam 1 and study hall for take-home essay exam 1 • Due Saturday by 11:59 p.m. (Assignments tab): Draft 1 of take-home essay exam 1
6 (Feb 17–22)	Topics: • The common good • Peer review • Studying the United States in comparative perspective Learning targets: • Define the common good, assess the extent to which Americans experience the common good, and recommend how Christians can pursue the common good • Evaluate another student's take-home essay on our faith–learning integration book • Explain reasons for studying the United States in comparative perspective	• In class on Monday: Begin documentary on Christianity and the common good (with Dr. Black) and finish class with a peer review (participation opportunity) • Due Tuesday by 11:59 p.m. (Assignments tab): Draft 2 of take-home essay exam 1 • Before class on Friday: Read chapter 1 of *American Difference* • In class on Friday: Bonus quiz
7 (Feb 24–Mar 1)	Topics: • Similarities between the United States and other countries • American exceptionalism Learning targets: • Compare the United States with other countries • Identify and explain policy differences between the United States and other advanced industrial democracies	• Start of class on Monday: Reading quiz 3 on chapters 2–3 of *American Difference* • In class on Friday: Bonus quiz
8 (Mar 3–8)	Topics: • Political culture and political ideology • Civil liberties and civil rights Learning targets: • Compare and contrast the political cultures and political ideologies in the United States and other advanced industrial democracies • Explain the U.S. Constitution's emphasis on civil liberties and the contemporary relevance of civil liberty and public safety in American life	• Before class on Monday: Read chapter 4 of *American Difference* • Monday at 12:00 p.m.: Start discussion board 1 • Tuesday at 11:59 p.m.: Complete first post on discussion board 1 • Before class on Wednesday: Read chapter 5 of *American Difference* • Thursday at 11:59 p.m.: Finish discussion board 1 • In class on Friday: Bonus quiz
9 (Mar 17–22)	Topics: • MC and TF exam 2 • Take-home essay exam 2 (group) Learning targets: • Demonstrate your knowledge of unit 2 through an MC and TF exam • Analyze and evaluate the content of unit 2, in collaboration with a group partner, through a take-home essay exam	• In class on Monday: Catch-up day for unit 2 • In class on Wednesday: Review for exam 2, with a participation opportunity • In class on Friday: MC and TF exam 2 and study hall for take-home essay exam 2 • Due Saturday by 11:59 p.m. (Assignments tab): Draft 1 of take-home essay exam 2

10 (Mar 24–29)	Topics: • Constitutional arrangements • Governing institutions Learning targets: • Identify and evaluate constitutional differences across countries • Explain and evaluate how the legislative and executive branches of government work	• Before class on Monday: Read chapter 6 of *American Difference* • Monday at 12:00 p.m.: Start discussion board 2 • Tuesday at 11:59 p.m.: Complete first post on discussion board 2 • Before class on Wednesday: Read chapter 7 of *American Difference* • Thursday at 11:59 p.m.: Finish discussion board 2 • In class on Friday: Bonus quiz
11 (Mar 31–Apr 5)	Topics: • Interest groups • American politics research Learning targets: • Explain interest group development and operation, and compare the U.S. interest group system with interest group systems in other advanced industrial democracies • Explain and evaluate part of a panel on American politics from the 2025 Midwest Political Science Association Conference	• Start of class on Monday: Reading quiz 4 on chapter 8 of *American Difference* • In class on Wednesday: Bonus quiz • In class on Friday: Stream part of an American politics panel from the 2025 Midwest Political Science Association Conference, with a participation opportunity
12 (Apr 7–12)	Topics: • Interest groups (continued) • Political parties Learning targets: • Apply your knowledge of interest groups by creating an ad for an organization of your choice (simulation 2; group activity) • Explain political party development and compare party systems in the United States and other countries	• In class on Monday: Start simulation 2 • In class on Wednesday: Finish simulation 2 • Before class on Friday: Read chapter 9 of *American Difference* • In class on Friday: Bonus quiz • Due Saturday by 11:59 p.m. (Assignments tab): Draft 2 of take-home essay exam 2
13 (Apr 14–19)	Topics: • Electoral institutions Learning targets: • Identify and evaluate electoral institutions in the United States and other countries	• Start of class on Monday: Reading quiz 5 on chapter 10 of *American Difference* • No class on Friday: Easter break—Christ died for our sins and rose again!
14 (Apr 21–26)	Topics: • U.S. party system • Electoral behavior Learning targets: • Identify obstacles to the development of a third major party in the United States and assess the prospects for change • Explain electoral behavior in the United States and other advanced industrial democracies	• Before class on Monday: Read the Drutman article • Start of class on Wednesday: Reading quiz 6 on chapter 11 of *American Difference* • Due Thursday by 11:59 p.m. (Assignments tab): Reflection paper • In class on Friday: Bonus quiz
15 (Apr 28–May 3)	Topics: • Political culture and political ideology, revisited • Comparative method • MC and TF exam 3 • Take-home essay exam 3 (individual) Learning targets: • Explain how the U.S. political culture of individualism and political ideology of limited government affect the American	• Before class on Monday: Read chapter 12 of *American Difference* • In class on Wednesday: Review for exam 3, with a participation opportunity • Friday: Final exams at Erskine begin (our exam date: TBD) • Due on the day of our final exam by 11:59 p.m. (Assignments tab): Take-home essay

	emphasis on civil liberties, balance between majoritarian and consensus democracy, interest group pluralism, personalistic politicians, and low voter turnout rates • Understand and apply the comparative method to questions about U.S. and comparative politics • Demonstrate your knowledge of unit 3 through an MC and TF exam • Analyze and evaluate the content of unit 3 through a take-home essay exam	• exam 3 • Have a good summer!

Assignments and Activities:

Assignments	Points
Participation	50
Discussion Board Reflection Paper	25
Simulations	40
Reading Quizzes	50
Multiple-Choice and True/False Exams	385
Take-Home Essay Exams	450
Total	**1,000**

The graded assignments reflect the objectives for our course on the first page of this syllabus. They allow me to measure, for example, how well students understand how the U.S. political system operates (Student Learning Goal #1).

In assessing student work, I aim for fairness and consistency regardless of student background or prior grades in this course or any previous classes with me. I do **not** want to stereotype some students as "A students" and others as "B students," etc. Everyone should be able to ask about their scores on assignments, and you can improve your overall grade if you work hard and respond to my feedback.

My commitments to fairness, consistency, and academic integrity motivate me to incorporate **grace** into the design of assignments and then apply the specified requirements to all students. I will **not** discourage diligent students by changing the "rules of the game" and showing additional kindness in response to low grades from other students. For example, the lowest homework score is dropped from your final grade.

Participation (50 points)

Many class sessions will require students to participate by joining a discussion, responding to a prompt question, completing a survey, or engaging in another activity. Please bring an electronic device to class to be eligible for all participation points. To provide **grace**, I will **not** count the first four missed participation opportunities against your grade. Afterward, your participation grade will be calculated based on the percentage of completed participation opportunities.

In addition to in-class activities, the participation category will evaluate students on two homework assignments: discussion boards 1 and 2, which will connect current or recent political events to the main course reading(s) of the week. Students will be required to submit 5 posts per discussion board for a total of 10 participation opportunities. More details on the discussion boards will be available later this semester.

Everyone who attends class regularly and completes the two discussion boards should be able to earn **100%** for participation and learn more about U.S. politics!

Students with excused absences (i.e., illness, a death in the family, or representing Erskine in a recognized school activity) can make up a day's worth of missed participation opportunities by writing a 70-word summary of the readings for the week and submitting it to "Reading Summaries/Participation" on the Assignments tab on Brightspace (due by the start of our final exam timeslot). If a student has excused absences for 2 (3) of our class sessions for the week, the summary must be approximately 140 (200) words.

Discussion Board Reflection Paper (25 Points)

After the final discussion board concludes on **March 27** (please see above), you will review your two discussion forum experiences with a 300-word reflection paper (worth 25 points) in which you answer question such as the following:

- What did you learn about U.S. politics from the discussion board assignments?
- Did the conversations affect your own political views? If so, how?
- How satisfied were you with the outcomes of the discussions? Why is that?
- To what extent did you apply Dr. Black's book to your discussion board conversations? How did you practice the principles in *Honoring God*, or why didn't you implement them?

To encourage the development of writing skills (Student Learning Goal #4), you will take a preliminary copy of the paper to one of the student readers at the Write Here Center (WHC) in Watkins Student Center, which is next to the dining hall. You should have sufficient time to visit the WHC, as there will be **four weeks** between the conclusion of the second discussion board and the due date for the reflection paper on **April 24**.[2] As long as you visit the Write Here Center and write at least 300 words, you will receive the full 25 points (i.e., **100%**). More details about the reflection paper will be distributed later in the semester.

Simulations (40 Points)

I want our class to be fun, interesting, and interactive. Learning occurs not just by hearing, but also by doing. Therefore, we will simulate real-world political interactions and decisions through in-class activities scheduled for **February 10 and, if needed, February 12** (practicing political civility—a theme of unit 1—through a series of debates on the issues of the day) and **April 7 and April 9** (applying our knowledge of interest groups by creating an ad about current events). More details will be distributed prior to the simulations.

Reading Quizzes (50 Points)

To maximize learning and inspire student reading, I plan to assign quizzes **before** we cover content in class. Each of the 6 reading quizzes will last for 5 minutes and contain 5 multiple-choice or true–false questions on the assigned text(s). The lowest quiz score for the semester will be dropped. I plan to provide advice to guide your reading and prepare you for success. Each quiz will begin at the **start of class on Monday or Wednesday** (weeks noted above). Students can make up missed quizzes **only** with a documented absence. The deadline for taking make-up quizzes is the start of the class session immediately following the period of documented dismissal; I encourage students taking make-up quizzes to arrive to class early or visit me during office hours (see page 1 of this syllabus). **Using external information, including artificial intelligence, during a quiz will result in a score of 0.** Quizzes will be available on the Quizzes tab on Brightspace.

Multiple-Choice and True/False Exams (385 Points)

To ensure students have a well-rounded knowledge of course material, each of our three units will contain a multiple-choice and true/false exam. Questions will cover a variety of subjects and tap different levels of knowledge (e.g., factual, explanatory, analytical, and critical). Dates are February 14 for exam 1 (100 points), March 21 for exam 2 (125 points), and finals week for exam 3 (160 points). Exams 2 and 3 are **not** comprehensive. Students without an excused absence can take the exam late for a **35% deduction**. A study guide with additional information will be available prior to the exam, and in-class review sessions are noted in the schedule above. Please let me know if you have questions about any of the exams.

Take-Home Essay Exams (450 Points)

According to Student Learning Goal #4, you will "[e]ngage in academic writing, with a focus on American government." Therefore, you will critically interact with each unit through 3 take-home essay exams (3 exams x 150 points per exam = 450 points). The prompt and instructions will be on your exam study guide. Each essay exam will be due after the in-class multiple-choice and true/false exam, and the first two take-home exams introduce **grace** by requiring students to submit first and second drafts to improve their writing and maximize their grade (peer review for exam 1 and feedback from me for exam 2). Moreover, exam 2 will integrate **grace** by assigning students to share the workload in groups of 2. (One group will have 3 if our class consists of an odd number of students.) Exam 3, meanwhile, will be an individual, one-submission assignment. Due dates are listed in the course schedule above, and more details about each exam will be available in the study guide.

Extra Credit (30 Points)

[2] If you are a commuter student who works full time, I will function as a proxy Write Here Center reader **if** you e-mail a preliminary paper to me at least 48 hours before the reflection paper deadline.

To reward note-taking and permit you to test your knowledge of class content in a low-stress environment, I will prepare 10 open-notes quizzes worth 1 extra credit point each. These will be completed at the end of class on Friday or Wednesday.

You also can earn 10 extra credit points if a majority of students complete the online, end-of-semester course evaluations. Please note that **individual course evaluations are confidential**.

Finally, 10 additional extra credit points are available through an extra credit event (e.g., a political speech) or paper. Details about extra credit event(s) will be announced later. Here are guidelines for the paper: During unit 1, I plan to distribute news articles for the reading quizzes; please select one article for this assignment. Current events reveal the relevance of political science. In a 150+ word essay due on Brightspace by the start of our final exam time slot (to be announced), please cover at least part of the following:

- How does the media content relate to material covered in class?
- What is your reaction to the media content? Do you find it important, interesting, or problematic? If so, why? With whom in the media content do you identify the most? Why? What is your emotional reaction to the media content? Are you angry, anxious, or enthusiastic? Why? What is your spiritual response? In your view, how should Christians respond to this news? **I invite you to include a prayer in your spiritual response.**

Late Work: Late work can be completed for assignments worth more than 20 points. Late deductions for multiple-choice and true/false exams are noted above. For papers, my general policy is -10% prior to late deadline 1 and -20% afterward.

Assessment and Grading:

Grading Scale:			
A	**93-100%**	**C**	**73-77%**
A-	**90-93%**	**C-**	**70-73%**
B+	**87-90%**	**D+**	**67-70%**
B	**83-87%**	**D**	**60-67%**
B-	**80-83%**	**F**	**0-60%**
C+	**77-80%**		

The grading scale is designed to facilitate grace **and** academic integrity. I will round your overall grade to the next level if your percentage falls within 0.25%. For example, a final percentage of 92.75% will receive an A (93% or higher) instead of an A- (90–93%), but a final percentage of 92.55% will remain an A-.

Expectations of Students and Class Policies:

1. *Conduct*: At Erskine College, your conduct is not merely a set of rules but a reflection of your character and respect for God, professors, and fellow students. Upholding these values is crucial to maintaining the integrity of our community. Any form of dishonesty, such as cheating, fabricating, or plagiarizing, not only dishonors you and your classmates but also undermines the principles of the College. The consequences of such actions are as follows: For infraction 1, you will receive 0 points on a multiple-choice and true/false exam, or the penalty on written work will be proportional to the infraction (e.g., -50% if half of the text is plagiarized). For infraction 2, you will receive 0 points on the assignment and a warning, shared with Dean Shane Bradley and your coach if you are a student athlete, that a third violation will result in failure from the course. For infraction 3, you will fail the course.
2. *Behavior*: At Erskine College, we value respectful behavior in the classroom. We believe each student's engagement and attentiveness contribute significantly to the learning environment. Your respectful behavior is not only expected but also appreciated, as it reflects your active participation in the class.
3. *Attendance*: Your presence in class is not just a formality but a critical factor in your academic success. The Erskine College faculty and staff are deeply committed to your progress as a student. We expect you to attend lectures and exams and to be punctual. We understand that unforeseen circumstances may arise; and in such cases, absences will be excused for College-sanctioned events, illness, and/or family emergencies. However, to ensure the excused absence, please provide approved documentation. **In summary, every three tardies will be considered one unexcused absence,**

and each unexcused absence after six unexcused absences will result in a deduction of 1.5% from the overall class grade. Absences and tardies prior to the drop/add deadline do **not** count against you.

4. *Cell Phones and Electronic Devices*: Please use personal devices for classroom purposes. You are **welcome** to take notes on tables and laptop computers, but phone usage during lectures or class discussion is **prohibited**. If I identify unauthorized uses of technology, I will ask students to stop. If students ignore my warning, I will count them absent for the day.
5. *Study Time*: Most college courses require that students spend a significant amount of time outside of class in individual study time. A guideline is to spend 2–3 hours weekly for every credit hour. This means that in a 3-credit course, at least 6–9 hours of outside study per week would be expected. The actual in-class meeting time is short in college courses because students are expected to work independently outside of class to meet the course requirements.
6. *Accommodation and Special Needs*: Your instructor is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for disabilities, including learning disabilities, in accordance with Erskine College policies. Students with documented special needs should contact the office of the Dean of the College to request accommodation. You must disclose your disability information promptly and discuss your accommodation needs. Requests must be made in writing using the Accommodation Request and Documentation Form, accompanied by current documentation provided by a qualified healthcare professional. Accommodations are determined based on the provided documentation and Erskine College policies, with verification of professional documentation by the College. Please refer to the Student Handbook for detailed accommodation and special needs information.
7. *Retention of Examinations and Assignments*: Instructors will retain copies of student examinations and assignments not returned to students for one semester in case of a dispute between a faculty member and a student in assigning or recording a grade. After that time, instructors may discard course materials in a manner that preserves student confidentiality.
8. *Email Policy*: Students are issued an official Erskine College student email address when they are admitted to the College. This is the only electronic mailing address recognized by the College. Students are responsible for all official College communications, including attachments transmitted to their Erskine College email address. Erskine College faculty and staff are not responsible for forwarding emails to personal email accounts that are not assigned by the College. Students are required to check their Erskine College email daily.
9. *Work Submission Policy*: Most assignments will be submitted on the class website on Brightspace. If technological problems prevent the submission of an assignment, you should provide photographic or video **evidence** of the issue for me to grant you an extension. For example, if the Internet fails immediately before—not five hours before—the deadline for a paper, you can take a photo or screenshot of the problem and then send it to me once Internet has been restored. Please submit work via email **only** if necessary. I reserve the right to decline email assignment submissions.
10. *Work-from-Home Policy*: My wife, Jacki, and I welcomed our first child into the world in April 2023. Dean Shane Bradley kindly has given me permission to cancel in-person meetings on occasion so that I can enjoy time with baby Joel. Therefore, I may deliver class content electronically approximately once or twice per month. Any class cancellations will be communicated in advance. Furthermore, Jacki is pregnant again ... now with twins! The due date is May 14, but they could arrive early. If so, I reserve the right to adjust class to support my family during a wonderful and challenging time while we adjust to life with 3 children outside of the womb! For instance, I might rearrange the class schedule or work from home on traditional lecture days if the twins are born during the semester.

Disclaimer note: This syllabus is subject to modification. The instructor will communicate with students about any changes.

Semester Dates: Please review the following important dates:

1. *Drop/Add Deadline*: Friday, January 17
2. *Withdrawal Deadline*: Monday, March 24
3. *Tuition Refund Policies*: Students who withdraw from Erskine College will receive refunds depending on which week of classes they leave the institution: 90% in the first week, 75% in the second week, 50% in the third week, 25% in the fourth week, and 0% afterward.

STUDENT POLICY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I acknowledge that I have read and agree to abide by the terms and conditions of this syllabus. If I have questions or concerns about this, I will reach out to my instructor before the assignment deadlines.

Student Name Course

Student Signature Date

Please return this form to your course instructor for EACH course for which you are registered.